



2010 SESSION UPDATE

From State Representative

Audrey Gibson

Dear Constituent and Friend,

Representing you and your family in the Florida House of Representatives continues to be a rewarding privilege, even through policy challenges and tough budget times.

As you may know, much of the country is still recovering from the recession, including Florida. With this in mind, during the 2010 legislative session, my colleagues and I focused much of our attention on policy to enhance economic development and job creation. Additionally, the issues of education and healthcare remained a priority in the budget process, and again this year, federal economic recovery dollars enabled us to lessen potential severe cuts.

This said however, I could not whole-heartedly embrace a budget that leaves federal unemployment stimulus dollars on the table; shifts \$160 million from the state's transportation trust fund, delaying roadwork projects and jobs we need now; cuts \$10.5 million from county health departments and \$10 million from the Healthy Families and another \$2.6 million from Healthy Start coalitions, both of which have been successful in increasing healthy baby and healthy family outcomes.

Further the budget only adds a mere \$1.22 per student to education funding, which still does not get us back to 06-07 levels. Finally, the budget cuts funding for nursing homes and hospitals, including a 7-percent reduction in state payments for care of the indigent. Nevertheless, I know that Floridians will help each other through these times.

In this legislative update, I have highlighted those policy matters I consider to be more of an immediate impact for you and your family. However, if there are other issues you would like to discuss, or need further information on, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

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COMMITTEES & COUNCILS

- Roads, Bridges, & Ports Policy Committee - *Democratic Ranking Member*
- Policy Council
- Transportation & Economic Development Appropriations Committee
- Civil Justice and Courts Policy Committee
- Criminal & Civil Justice Policy Council
- Select Committee on Seminole Indian Compact Review
- *Chair* - Duval County Legislative Delegation

EDUCATION

I believe that greater emphasis on K-12 education is the first step toward creating high-wage jobs and a quality workforce that the 21st Century economy demands. That's why I had hoped the Legislature would have found ways to increase K-12 education spending and keep college tuition low. Instead, average per student spending increased only by \$1.22, and university tuition can be raised up to 15% without any input from the Legislature. On the brighter side, the governor has already signed SB4 which raises education standards and improves accountability, and begins to phase out the high school Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in math, science and writing, and introduces end-of-course exams in Algebra 1, Geometry and Biology 1. We also passed legislation incorporating Civics education in middle school grades.



Florida has made great strides in improving education since voters passed the Class Size Reduction constitutional amendment and schools are less crowded. In 2002, the average classroom size for PreK-3 was 23, today it is 16; the average classroom size for grades 4-8 was 24, today it's 19; and the average number of students in grades 9-12 classrooms, was 24, today it is 22. Because of Senate Joint Resolution 2 (SJR2), this November, the Legislature will ask voters to revisit their previous decision on class size goals. Not once did I hear from constituents making any requests to change class size goals. Nevertheless the issue will be on the ballot in November and I believe this to be a threat to the educational gains our children have made.



KEEPING OUR MOST VULNERABLE SAFE

The safety of our children, seniors and those largely unable to look out for themselves is a matter of extreme concern for me. That's why I am pleased to have been a member of both Councils that crafted and passed HB 7069 related to Background Screening.

HB 7069-Background Screening, revises background screening requirements for various service providers and volunteers so that we protect our most vulnerable, children, seniors and the disabled. The bill requires electronic submission of fingerprints and in nearly all cases, level 2 screening standards so that providers are aware of the full national history of a potential employee who will be responsible for the care of others. The bill provides that an employer may not hire, select, or otherwise allow employee contact with any vulnerable person until screening is completed. Further, HB 7069 authorizes agencies to request the retention of certain fingerprints by FDLE and requires employers to keep state agencies informed of certain changes concerning persons whose fingerprints are retained.

HB 7069 is a major step in public safety policy, and I was happy to support the bill!

ENERGY

While renewable energy resources and "green" jobs remain high in focus, given Florida's budget crunch, the Legislature needed to be forward thinking but prudent in its approach. I supported a bipartisan effort to make clean energy technology accessible to homeowners and businesses. Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing, which is at the heart of HB 7179, provides local governments the flexibility to create programs to lend funds to property owners for qualifying improvements that



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incorporate energy conservation efficiency, renewable energy and wind resistance. These improvements include funding the use of things like solar panels, hydrogen technology and wind barrier installations. The loans can be repaid over time depending on the amount and specific terms of the loan and can also be repaid as part of a participating homeowner's property tax bill.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY COMMISSION

SIGNED INTO LAW BY GOVERNOR



HB 1297, or what ultimately became SB 2470, relating to the Northeast Florida Regional Transportation, formally establishes a commission to continue to study the regionalization of transportation in Northeast Florida and continues the focus of legislation I sponsored last year. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority will staff the commission which will be composed of members of the communities of Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. John's counties. The commission will begin to lay the foundation for reaching consensus on providing seamless services to our area and enable us to better position ourselves to draw down more federal dollars.



BACK TO SCHOOL SALES TAX HOLIDAY COMING TO A STORE NEAR YOU!

Once again this year I was happy to vote for the reinstatement of the back-to-school sales tax holiday that benefits Florida's families. The tax holiday provides a three-day sales tax exemption for clothing, books and backpacks, which cost \$50 or less and are purchased from August 13-15, 2010.

This year's back-to-school tax holiday is expanded to also include school supplies that cost \$10 or less per item, these include pens, pencils, notebooks, notebook paper, rulers, glue, binders, lunch boxes, construction paper, markers and folders.

See below for a complete listing of items covered under HB 483 & 469.

SALES TAX HOLIDAY • AUGUST 13-15, 2010 • GUIDELINES

Books, defined as a set of printed sheets bound together and published in a volume, but do not include newspapers, magazines, or other periodicals.

Clothing and Footwear, defined as articles of wearing apparel, including all footwear, except skis, swim fins, roller blades, and skates.

Wallets, and bags including handbags, backpacks, fanny packs, and diaper bags, but excluding briefcases, suitcases, and other garment bags.



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